

## Trinity Sunday - The death of George Floyd

On Saturday I listened to Pastor-Agu-Irukwu, a British Nigerian Christian, speak with restraint, dignity and passion about the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in the state of Minnesota. According to the press, Mr Floyd was himself a Christian and been a member of a discipleship programme in his local church.

You will know the story - a local shopkeeper became suspicious that he was offering a forged bank note. He called the police and Mr Floyd was arrested as he returned to his car. As a white affluent woman I have in the past tried to pay for shopping with foreign coins or euro notes. Once or twice when we used the old, round £1.00 coins the newsagent would point out that it was forged. There was a moment of embarrassment - then I apologised and we moved on. Mutual esteem meant that we both assumed I had simply been careless rather than culpable. Mr Floyd was not afforded that courtesy.

Courtesy & mutual esteem were absent in Minneapolis - with fatal consequences. The police who arrested him seemed to have assumed his guilt & quickly to have decided he was resisting arrest. They were slow to recognise that he was in danger of asphyxiation in spite the warning cries of rage and fear from crowd. From the bored look on the face of the police, this was simply routine work. PC Chauvin's relationship with Mr Floyd, which resulted in Mr Floyd's death and for which he has been charged with murder, was one of minimal concern for Mr Floyd's wellbeing, a desire to control at all costs and supreme detachment from the consequences of their interaction.

I mention disengagement, control and detachment, because I have been reading William Vanstone's book, 'Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense.' He makes the point that everyone, whatever their intelligence or education can recognise true love and distinguish it from fake love. The ability is hard wired into us. Very small children know if they are truly loved - or being bribed and tolerated. And Vanstone's suggestion is, that while it is possible to fake loving concern, true love is characterised by being unlimited, not seeking to control and being endlessly engaged with the beloved.

Paul suggests something similar- Love is patient, kind, but he knows that love is more than patient kindness. Good teachers and nurses are often both patient and kind- but that may be no more than praiseworthy professionalism. True love is love without limits.

'Love will never come to an end.'<sup>1</sup>

The complete absence of love in the interaction between Mr Floyd and the law enforcers was immediately recognised by the black and ethnic minority as part of their shared historical and contemporary experience - which is a lack of respect for the black and ethnic community **because** of their colour or ethnicity.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8

The assumption of the police seems to have been that a tall young man who is black is 'a risk' to law and order. (Mr Floyd was 6'6.") The long-term failure of the American government to engage successfully with the educational and employment challenges facing particularly young black people, and the casual racism of individuals - all this has led to the overflowing of a sense of injustice into protests.

It is not just an American problem. There have been protests in sympathy in more than 76 American states but also in London, Berlin, Rio de Janeiro, Canada - doubtless many other places and yesterday in Bath. The social contract is broken. The belief that we all have a stake in our society and that we are all treated equally and equally valued is in ruins. It was undermined in this country by the government's treatment of the Windrush generation, some of whom, despite living and working in the UK for decades, have been told they are living here illegally because of a lack of official paperwork and in some cases deported.

This is a living issue for Christians. We don't believe in a God who set the universe ticking and then left it, and us look after itself- although intellectually that might be attractive. Instead, we know the engagement of the love of God who came to us in Jesus of Nazareth. During his life on earth he experienced and spoke out against the limits of our concern for each other - our hypocrisy, our need to control and the limits of our kindness. Very soon his self-giving love reached the limits of what the state would tolerate and he felt the 'knee on his neck.' Like George Floyd, he died of asphyxia.

Let me be clear. I am not saying that George Floyd died a Christ-like death. But I saying that the death of Jesus of Nazareth was a common death which shared in and mirrored the death of George Floyd as it shares in and mirrors the death of all powerless people. Love made Christ's death possible, the self emptying love which is at the heart of the incarnation. And the mutual indwelling love of the Trinity- the love of Father for child and child for Father and of both for the world, - which welcomes us into the relationship of love, exist s before the creation of the world and is the only hope for the world. This is the relationship into which we are called and from which all our relationships with must start. I do mean all our relationships. We talk of 'the kingdom coming' but that means changing the relationships in society so they are based in limitless, engaged, uncontrolling love.

We can't change the world, we can only pray 'Your kingdom come' But we can change ourselves. So may we in Christ Church undertake with God's help to be aware of racism in ourselves, our community and our society; to encourage and applaud the growth of a black and ethnic minority presence at the very top of our legal, medical, educational and political establishment; to celebrate diversity in our communities and to see all our relationships - particularly with those whom we see as 'different' as a mirror of the relationality at the heart of the Trinity.